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August 7th, 2025

Is the suspension of asylum applications in Greece justified?

In July, Greece implemented a three-month suspension on the processing of asylum applications from North Africa. Katerina Glyniadaki examines the rationale behind the decision and its likely implications for migration.

On 11 July, **the Greek parliament voted** for a three-month suspension of refugee asylum applications for those arriving from North Africa. The harsh measures came as a response to a sharp increase in irregular crossing from Libya in recent months. According to the **latest official figures**, a total of 8,200 migrants have arrived in Crete and Gavdos since the beginning of 2025, an unprecedented number for this Greek region.

While the Greek Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy has acknowledged that these movements **reflect the destabilisation of the situation in Sudan and the broader region**, the government's official stance is anything but migrant friendly. The Greek Minister of Migration and Asylum called the increase of irregular crossings "**an invasion of Europe**", and the deputy minister labelled it a "**hybrid attack**" because it includes the weaponisation of migrants, noting also that "most are economic immigrants". Greek officials have also reminded us of the **Evros crisis of 2020**, when asylum was again suspended for a month at the land border with Turkey for the same reasons.

Conflicting pressures

These developments bring to the fore a broader dilemma many western governments face. On the one hand, they are legally obliged to implement the international human rights agreements they have signed, and as such allow and facilitate asylum application processing. On the other hand, protecting a country's national borders and sovereignty is also a priority. In practice, these two goals may at times be in contradiction with one another.

Beyond this contradiction, the Greek government is also facing a set of conflicting domestic pressures. Local government officials and representatives of the tourism industry have expressed alarm about the recent migrant arrivals and **voiced their concerns** over the prospect of a new migrant reception centre in Crete.

Migration has also been a point of concern for right-wing voters, some of whom have taken to the streets to demonstrate. At the same time, however, **local demonstrations** are also taking place by pro-migrant groups in Crete, an island that prides itself on welcoming foreigners, having resisted the Nazi invasion in the Second World War, and having kept the far-right Golden Dawn out in the recent years.

What complicates matters further in this case is the economic dimension. With significant **economic growth** in recent years, especially in the tourism sector, Greece has been facing **severe labour shortages**. The government has made attempts to address these through **seasonal worker visas** and **bilateral agreements** with third countries. The implicit message therefore is that tourists are welcome, foreign workers are welcome, but asylum seekers are not. This adds an additional layer of contradictions.

EU solidarity

Regardless of one's stance on this divisive issue, the Greek migration minister is right in one thing: Greece's borders are European borders. Whether migrants arrive irregularly from Turkey or Libya to Greece, from West Africa to the Canary Islands of Spain, or from Belarus to Lithuania, the first reception countries cannot shoulder alone the administrative burden that comes with asylum processing (and subsequent migrant integration or return). If there is one lesson that should have been learned from the so-called European migration crisis of 2015-2017, it is that more intra **EU solidarity** is sorely needed.

That said, the new Greek plan is undoubtedly problematic. Human rights representatives have voiced "**serious concerns**" over the legislative amendment and challenged its legality. They have reminded us that Sudanese civilians are **forced to flee** a devastating war and that seeking asylum is a **fundamental human right**. They also speak of **horrific conditions** in Libyan detention centres. Yet, faced with a choice between upholding human rights and underscoring state sovereignty, thereby appealing to right-wing voters, the Greek government has currently chosen the latter.

The hope seems to be that a **Meloni-style** response to increased sea arrivals may have the desired effect of reducing irregular crossings. Partly by employing a strong anti-migration discourse and implementing bilateral and multilateral agreements with Northern African countries, Italy has recently seen a reduction in migrant arrivals from North Africa. The suspension of asylum applications in Greece is expected to achieve the same result. Whether it will, especially in the long term, remains to be seen.

A decisive act or impression management?

There are further questions about the feasibility of the plan, especially with regards to the “quick return” of those who arrive and who will no longer have the right to apply for asylum. The insurmountable existing **legal and logistical hurdles** concerning the return of third country nationals remain very much present.

This either makes the current government naively and unrealistically optimistic on the matter or, alternatively, signifies a conscious, performative act of impression management. Similar again to Meloni, we observe a gap between strong words and practical approaches on the ground. This becomes especially obvious when considering the opening of worker visas for the same nationalities of those promised to be returned.

The EU’s strategy of spending billions to keep would-be migrants out has not brought the desired results so far. Counterintuitively, perhaps creating more, and more accessible, legal migration pathways would be a more effective and sustainable approach to managing international migration and preventing those in a state of desperation from attempting treacherous journeys.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics. The article was submitted for publication by the author on 15 July 2025. Featured image credit: [Ajdin Kamber](#) / [Shutterstock.com](#)



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